

Inchoate by Eidolepus

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Ted Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler

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Summary:

Nancy felt like one of Jonathan's pictures: a snapshot of time trapped within a little frame, still developing from a fuzzy image into its own beauty, though not quite sure of its own direction despite everyone else being able to say. She supposed adolescence was like that, too, but you never knew until it was entirely clear years later exactly who you were becoming. Slowly, it was becoming increasingly ironic that there was a formula to defeating an inter-dimensional monster, but nothing on the topic of how to deal with what was left afterwards.

Inchoate

The end of normalcy began when she left Steve's room and realized that Barb was missing. It didn't settle in, however, until Nancy found herself standing in a steamed-up bathroom the night of Will Byers' return, staring at the shower wall. The first time she had done this, she panicked. This time around she expected nothing less. Hope, maybe, for peace, now that it was all over, but Nancy considered herself somewhat of a realist and analyzing this situation was the last scrap of sanity she had, even if she were moments away from losing it.

With the water running down her shoulders came the weight of the world. And with the weight of this world came the weight of the other one, where kids were stolen and Barb was dead. They had found her body, Joyce and Hopper, and Joyce was kind enough to inform Nancy of her loss amidst the eradication of her own. Not that Nancy wasn't glad that Will had been brought back--she was rightfully ecstatic--but it didn't change the fact that Barb was dead and it was all her fault. It was ironic, she thought, that the universe could bend its laws to create an inconvenience but not to allow the reversal of time to take back your mistakes. With each action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Barb was gone, but Will had been saved; their world had been created, but so had another; time travel wasn't real, but monsters were. How cruel science could be. If she were paying any attention to science, that was only a modicum of how cruel it could be. Science stated that if that Thing could consume life, it had to have a way to create its own, too.

Perhaps it just lived on in her head, she decided. What It left behind could make a nice home there feeding off of her sanity. Nancy had already felt her grip on reality slipping away in the silence of the car ride home. Mike had sat staring out the window, and Nancy had done the same. She watched as the passing landscape morphed in the darkness, evolving into the feeding grounds of the beast. The possibility of what could be prowling out there hadn't had as much weight then as it did now. If there had been one, there could be another, and it could come back. For all Nancy knew, there were multiple other Things, now waiting within the walls to drag her back

inside where she belonged.

She opened her eyes, and looked around. Considering it safe, she reached for the soap.

There couldn't be more than one. She had only seen one. Besides, Will Byers may be good at hiding, but he couldn't have been able to hide from *numerous* predators of an alternate dimension.

Right?

The vast expanse of Earth came to mind. How far did the Upside Down spread? What other lands had been touched, and how many other people had vanished there without a trace and were never found? What other branches of the government existed around the globe, stationed to cause and contain its fuck-ups within small towns that no one paid attention to?

The shampoo in her hand stung the open wound across her palm. Under the rushing shower water wasn't much of an improvement either, and Nancy bit the inside of her cheek as she tried to find a better solution.

It wasn't just psychological wounds she was carrying with her. No, that'd be letting her off easy. The first mental scarring had been her warning, and it was not heeded, so like a child she was facing the repercussions of what she had had to do. Later, a scar would be there forever, a brand from her shining moment.

All at once Nancy was reminded of the omniscience of her situation. If there were more, they were all around her, all the time, and she could only live in anxiety with the knowledge that she was being hunted from another world and never know until the lights flickered that it just might be too late.

They could smell her now, she was sure. She was wounded, naked, and vulnerable and they were in the walls and behind the tile and reaching through to grab her by the hair and-

She ripped the shower curtain open, tearing it from several rungs, and stepped back into the open room. The air was too thick as her

chest heaved it into her lungs with panicked gulps, and she needed out, right now. Her uninjured hand fumbled in turning the knobs to stop the water and as it grew quiet, she could hear her mother at the door.

“Nancy? Are you alright?”

“Yeah, Mom. I’m alright,” she answered.

“Are you sure? It sounded like-”

“I just fell, but I’m fine. It’s no big deal.”

Her towel was soft against her body. Like a blanket, it was wrapped around her shoulders while she held its ends together across her chest. Below, the rug met her softly as she slid, sitting, to the floor.

“Ok, Nance. Goodnight.”

Soft creaks signalled her mother’s return to her bedroom. Nancy sat quietly for a few moments, trying to scrounge what she could of herself back together.

Her pajamas lay folded on the sink, and she used the counter to stand, then grabbed her pants. She held the cotton before her and stepped into them, shaking, one leg at a time. Next she tugged on her shirt and found herself looking into the mirror. The girl staring back at her looked drawn, mature. Tired eyes, tired stare. Certainly not the Nancy Wheeler she looked at last week who was trying on the cute sweater to wear for Steve. That Nancy seemed to have been living a lie, in a perfect lying world.

Towel and old clothes slung across her arm, Nancy abandoned the idea of rebandaging her hand in favor of getting the hell out of there. She’d overheard the stoners at school talk about a “bad trip” and she was beginning to feel as if she were suffering from one. In her venture to her room, the dark hallway walls seemed to reach out at her, and anxiety welled through her chest until she finally stepped into the confines of her room.

Nancy discarded the items in her hands on the floor before climbing into bed. It was silent, leaving her alone with her thoughts once

again. She pulled her blankets tight around her, balling some of the fabric into her good hand as the other rest limp. It didn't take long to register that laying on her side wasn't safe; she couldn't see the wall behind her. So, Nancy resorted to positioning herself flat on her back, blankets pulled up past her breasts and nearly to her collarbone. When she was little, she'd had a nightlight to keep the monsters away, and two days ago she'd had Jonathan Byers. Now Jonathan was with Will an hour out of Hawkins, the nightlight had long been outgrown, and Nancy had only the two lamps on either bedstand. She had never wanted so strongly to not be alone in her life.

Author's Note:

Thank you for reading! This is my first time posting on Ao3, so I hope I did well.

This story is my first attempt at a slow burn fic, so constructive criticism, feedback, and advice is not only welcomed but very much appreciated! I hope to be updating this as often as I can.

Update: This fic has developed a lot since I posted this first chapter, so the summary has been updated!